# FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT:
## USING DATA FOR CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**CHAPTER 1**

*You cannot force commitment. What you can do…*
*you nudge a little here, inspire a little there,*
*and provide a role model. Your primary*
*influence is the environment you create.*

**Peter M. Senge**
**Author,** *The Fifth Discipline*

I have started many workshops in my multi-decade consulting career by asking participants, "What would it take to get learning growth for every student, every year, in your school?" After deliberation with teammates, teachers and administrators tell me these things need to be in place:

1. Teachers and administrators must *honestly* review and use their data—ALL their data, not just study a gap here or there.

2. Teachers and administrators must truly *believe* that *all* children can learn, or learning cannot and will not happen.

3. There must be *one vision* for the school—we have to get everyone on the same page and moving forward together.

4. *One plan* to implement the school vision must be in place. We cannot implement multiple unrelated plans.

5. Curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments must be *aligned* to *student learning standards.* We will only spin in circles if we do not have this alignment.

6. Staff need to *collaborate* and *use* student, classroom, grade level, and school level data. Teachers need to work together to determine what they need to do to ensure *every* student's learning.

7. Staff need *professional learning* to work differently when the data tell them they are not getting the results they want or that they might not be getting the results they expect. (Professional learning refers to ongoing, job-embedded, results-oriented learning for professional educators.)

8. Schools need to rethink their current structures as opposed to *adding on* to what is existing. (Structures include how curriculum and instruction are delivered. Add-ons are programs and interventions added to close a gap.)

What I do *not* hear is: "We have to study our gaps in performance using summative tests so we can make adequate yearly progress." Educators know, intuitively and experientially, that focusing only on gaps in performance on one summative test will not get student learning improvements for all students, yet it is easy to get caught up in trying to make the work simpler. When asked what is the hardest to do of the eight things listed above, most school staff members say, "It is all hard; it all needs to be done. We don't know how to do it *all*; therefore, we never have." Then they say, "If we had to pick one thing that is the hardest, it would be *honestly* reviewing and using all our data, then making the appropriate changes."

*When only some data are used, the focus is typically on the gaps and improving individual students who are not achieving on the one measure that is used for compliance, and not on what or how teachers are teaching, or how to improve learning for ALL students.*

It seems many schools do not have "working structures" in place to systematically and honestly review and then to use all their data to impact student learning results. Without a system or structure to review all the data, mostly external student learning compliance data are used. When only some data are used, the focus is typically on the gaps and improving individual students who are not achieving on that one measure that is used for compliance, and not on what or how teachers are teaching, or how to improve learning for *all* students. Without a system, structure, or vision in place to guide the use of all data, there is no new learning to change teacher attitudes, behaviors, or instruction—and ultimately improve student learning.

What would it look like if a school did all eight elements above? And what would be the outcomes? How can school staff do all these things within the confines of a school year? In order to get school staff to do all these things, we need to shift staff thinking about data use from simple compliance to a true commitment to improvement.

## MOVING AWAY FROM A SINGULAR FOCUS ON COMPLIANCE, TOWARD A COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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When schools focus primarily on compliance, they tend to concentrate their school improvement efforts on what and how they are being measured. Consider, for example, elementary schools in the United States when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability laws came into being in the early 2000s. Schools were measured on English Language Arts and Mathematics, only. Many schools believed that if they did well in Reading, everything else would follow. School days were reorganized to provide blocks of time for Language Arts. Many schools made incredible improvements in Language Arts because of that focus; however, Mathematics scores stayed pretty stagnant during that time. A few years later, many

states changed their Mathematics tests to require students to show how they came up with their answers. To meet these new accountability requirements, schools scrambled to teach writing, math vocabulary, and math concepts. With the new focus, those scores improved. Sadly, the Language Arts scores tended to go down.

Fast forward a decade later. Schools were accountable, for the first time, in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Guess what we found? Science and Social Studies had not been taught in some schools in the previous ten years.

When schools focus only on one part of student learning, the others parts will fall apart. Similar scenarios were created when schools focused on specific subgroups of students not making proficiency, or on the "Bubble Kids." "Bubble Kids" are students who perform just below proficiency. The thought is that by focusing on moving these students to proficiency, the school is sure to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Unfortunately, when schools focus only on a small group of students, the other students do not benefit.

Although efforts focused on one area or one student group caused increases to the detriment to other areas, many good things came from NCLB. Needs of student groups who never succeeded before were being met. Teachers learned they have to work together to get schoolwide gains—improvement in one grade level builds on the improvement of the previous grade levels. Schools learned that although they were being measured by one test, it takes more than just improving the results on that one test to get improvement throughout the school.

And now where are we? Schools are in great need of a framework for continuous school improvement and an assessment tool to tell them where they are in the process to help them stay focused on systemic improvement. When schools use a framework for continuous school improvement along with comprehensive data analysis, they understand how they are getting their results—what is working, and what is not working. They know the structures to have in place for continuous school improvement. When schools use a continuous school improvement self-assessment tool they know where they are in the process and how to get all their staff moving forward together.

Figure 1.1 shows the differences in actions on important measures between schools focused on compliance for accountability and schools that commit to using comprehensive data analysis for continuous school improvement.

Most of all, schools committed to using comprehensive data analysis to continuously improve their learning organization are able to blend creativity with discipline to create their future. Schools focused only on gaps and compliance can neither innovate nor create a future that looks different from the status quo. Such an approach inhibits systemic improvement and limits progress towards excellence and real equity.

*When schools use a framework for continuous school improvement, along with comprehensive data analysis, they understand how they are getting their results—what is working, and what is not working.*

**Figure 1.1**

**DIFFERENCES IN ACTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOLS FOCUSED ON COMPLIANCE AND SCHOOLS COMMITTED TO USING DATA ONLY FOR CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

| Key Components | Schools Focused on Compliance for Accountability… | Schools Committed to Using Data for Continuous School Improvement… |
|---|---|---|
| **Data Analysis** | Blame students for poor results (e.g., our results are not very good because our population lives in poverty).<br><br>Use student learning data, only, to close gaps.<br><br>Focus on "Bubble Kids." | Embrace whom they have as students and learn how to meet their needs, and ensure that *all* achieve.<br><br>Have all staff use demographic, perceptions, student learning, and school processes data to understand how to—<br>• meet the needs of students,<br>• understand what is working and what is not working,<br>• use what is working to serve *all* students, and<br>• predict and prevent failures, and optimize successes. |
| **Problem Solving** | Use problem solving in a reactive fashion. They tend to add fixes when problems occur. | Prepare staff to know how to problem solve together to get to and eliminate contributing causes, in a proactive fashion. |
| **Vision** | Focus only on achieving compliance and making Adequate Yearly Progress.<br><br>Add programs and interventions to what they are already doing when change is needed. | Have a vision about doing whatever it takes to improve teaching and learning.<br><br>Use data to inform the schoolwide vision that is created, embraced, and implemented by all staff members. The vision clarifies what teachers will teach, how teachers will teach and assess, and how everyone in the organization will treat each other, related to student learning standards. The vision provides the means for strategic, fast action-the scenarios have been played through. |
| **Planning** | Write school improvement plans to close gaps related to compliance. School goals are limited to improving test scores versus improving student learning. Reactive to compliance reports, these plans are usually about "fixing the kids" by prescribing add-on interventions. | Proactively write continuous school improvement plans to implement a vision that improves learning for *all* students and prepares them for college and careers. The plan interweaves the leadership structure, professional learning, and partnerships needed to implement the vision. |
| **Leadership** | Have top-down leadership that requires a focus on compliance and closing gaps. Areas of emphasis change as leaders change. | Create shared decision-making structures that support each other as they implement the vision, and improve learning for all students |
| **Professional Learning** | Use professional learning as a carrot and a stick. "If we are failing in this area, everyone has to go to this workshop."<br><br>Without new information, teachers do the same things over and over and hope for different results. | Understand that *collaboration* is required to improve teaching and learning. They build structures for all staff to collaborate and learn together. Time is dedicated for collaborative teams to review and make meaning of classroom and schoolwide data, and to discuss and apply options for improving student learning. |
| **Partnerships** | Have top-down leadership that requires a focus on compliance and closing gaps. Areas of emphasis change as leaders change. | Create shared decision-making structures that support each other as they implement the vision, and improve learning for all students |
| **Evaluation** | Use evaluation when required for external accountability. | Use data to continuously improve all aspects of the learning organization. |
| **Compliance** | Focus on what is being measured for compliance purposes only, and are expert at gap analysis.<br><br>Are content with the status quo as long as it meets compliance requirements.<br><br>Look for the easiest routes to becoming "adequate," as in making Adequate Yearly Progress. | Focus on creating and improving the learning organization to ensure learning for *all* students in all subject areas, so all students can be college and career ready. Accountability and compliance are a part of the process, but not the sole focus. |

## PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

*Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement,* Third Edition, is a call to action. It is about inspiring schools and districts to commit to a continuous school improvement framework that will result in improving teaching for every teacher, and improving learning for every student, in one year, through the comprehensive use of data. It is about providing a new definition of improvement, away from compliance, toward a commitment to excellence. This book provides the framework for continuous school improvement and guides staff through the work of moving the entire system forward with examples and tools. Any staff can start wherever they are, follow along, and commit to new levels of improvement, data literacy, and data use.

Used in this context, *data literacy* is the ability to collect, analyze, communicate, and use multiple measures of data to continuously improve all aspects of the learning organization, especially teaching and learning. *Data use* is the ability to transform data into information and then into action to improve all aspects of the learning organization.

To grow a data literate staff that uses data for continuous school improvement, multiple measures of data must be organized and accessible so staff can spend their time analyzing, making meaning of the results, and collaborating with one another to improve instruction. Data use will not happen on its own. Structures for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data, and structures for collaborating and learning together must be created, modeled, monitored, and encouraged. An organizational shift away from a singular focus on compliance, toward a true commitment to improvement through a shared vision is required.

## STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

*Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement,* Third Edition, starts with the framework for continuous school improvement and comprehensive data analysis. This book describes each of the components of the framework, structures that lead to a commitment to improved teaching and learning, and provides examples and activities for schools to do the work on their own. After the components are described, with references to tools to support the work of the components, a timeline for doing all the work within one school year is presented. All tools described in this text are provided in the chapters or appendices.

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## The Framework for Continuous School Improvement

**Chapter 2,** *The Continuous School Improvement Framework,* describes the framework for continuous school improvement that provides a simple, logical structure for reviewing and using multiple measures of data, creating and implementing a shared vision, and for measuring the impact of the vision and the vision implementation strategies on student learning.

## Gathering the Data and Cleaning Up the System

**Chapter 3,** *Who We Are:* **Demographic Data; Chapter 4,** *How We Do Business:* **Perceptions Data; Chapter 5,** *How Are Our Students Doing:* **Student Learning Data; Chapter 6,** *What Are Our Processes:* **School Processes Data,** feature the data (demographics, perceptions, student learning, and school processes) that are important for understanding *Where are we now?* in the continuous school improvement framework and in improving learning for *all* students. Each chapter defines a data category, why each is important for continuous school improvement, what data need to be gathered, and how to analyze, report, and use the data.

## Engaging Staff in Reviewing and Using Schoolwide Data

**Chapter 7,** *How Did We Get To Where We Are:* **Looking Across All of the Data,** describes how to engage staff in analyzing all types of data for comprehensive data analysis that will support your continuous school improvement efforts. This comprehensive data analysis sets up your school for planning, visioning, and evaluating.

## Going Deeper in the Data to Understand How the School is Getting Its Results

**Chapter 8,** *What Is Working and What Is Not Working:* **Delving Deeper Into the Data,** goes deep into a school's data to understand how the school is getting its current results. These analyses help staff understand what is working, what is not working, what to do to get different results, and add urgency to do so.

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## Engaging Staff in Creating a Shared Vision

**Chapter 9,** *Where Do We Want to Go:* **Creating a Shared Vision and Monitoring Its Implementation,** shows how to create, implement, and monitor a schoolwide, shared vision. It is the shared vision that allows staff to integrate large concepts into a single structure that everyone on staff can understand in the same way. It is the vision that ensures that data get used.

## Creating Structures to Implement the Shared Vision

**Chapter 10,** *How Are We Going to Get to Where We Want to Be:* **Implementing the Shared Vision by Creating a Plan for Continuous School Improvement,** describes how to create a continuous school improvement plan for implementing the shared vision in a manner that will lead to improved teaching and ultimately, increased student learning for *all* students. The collaborative structures that help with the implementation of the vision and plan include leadership, professional learning, and partnerships.

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## Collaborating to Use Data

**Chapter 11,** *Strategies for Teachers:* **Using Data to Implement the Vision Through the Continuous School Improvement Plan to Improve Teaching and Learning,** discusses meaningful strategies for helping teachers collaborate to use data to improve their teaching, and the learning for *all* students.

## Evaluating the Work

**Chapter 12,** *Is What We Are Doing Making a Difference:* **Evaluating Our Efforts,** provides structures for mere mortals to use to evaluate their continuous school improvement efforts, including evaluation of programs and processes, the continuous school improvement plan, goals, and vision.

## Making the Time for Continuous School Improvement

**Chapter 13,** *Continuous School Improvement Timeline:* **Making Time to Do the Work,** pulls all the work together into a timeline, with cross-references to components described in preceding chapters, tools provided in the appendices, and a description of the artifacts a school would produce using the tools and information gained from this book.

## Transforming a Complying School to a Learning Organization

**Chapter 14,** *The Transformation From a Complying School to a Learning Organization,* concludes the book by reviewing how committing to and implementing continuous school improvement creates learning organizations that improve teaching and learning on an ongoing basis.

Each chapter ends with a notice about time, **How Much Time Does It Take?,** which describes how much time it would take to do the work described in each chapter.

Also, at the end of each chapter, are **Reflection Questions** and **Application Opportunities.** Reflection questions ensure that readers/book study groups capture the main concepts of each chapter. You might want to review these questions before you read the chapter, as they also serve as learner outcomes. The application opportunities guide school staff through the work of comprehensive data analysis and continuous school improvement.

**Appendices.** The appendices house the activities and strategies referenced in the chapters and the timeline. A list of appendices is shown with the Table of Contents. Some readers might wonder why some of the appendices were not placed in the chapters. Appendices that have multiple uses are placed in the back for easy access and multiple reference and application. For example, instead of splitting up the data profile graphs and placing some in each data chapter, the graphs are shown in total as a complete data profile that models what we want schools to put together. At the same time, the data profile can be used as a case study. Readers can see what it looks like in complete form; teams can follow it to create their data profile; and a facilitator can use the whole data profile as a practice case study.

## UPDATES

This book updates *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement* (Second Edition, 2004; and First Edition, 1998). It shares new, evidence-based learnings about how to analyze, report, communicate, and use multiple measures data for continuous school improvement, and also provides new tools, timelines, and strategies to help schools use data to improve teaching and learning. This book provides an updated continuous school improvement framework, explains the components and structures for using schoolwide data for the purpose of continuous school improvement, and organizes the information for easy retrieval and application.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audiences for this book are—

1. School and district administrators and teachers working to engage, lead, and encourage all staff members to commit to using data to continuously improve their learning organizations.

2. College professors and students learning about continuous school improvement and data analysis implementation in schools. I would highly recommend the creation, analysis, and use of a data profile as a thesis or culminating project.

3. School staff book study groups. This book can help staff start, troubleshoot, and evaluate their own efforts.

4. District administrator book study groups. This book can help district administrators think about continuous school improvement implementation from the perspective of the schools, help them provide data for the schools, and help them implement a framework in which all their schools can thrive.

5. Leadership Training Programs, especially Performance-Based Leadership Courses, that are teaching administrative candidates about the impact strong leadership and data can have on the implementation of continuous school improvement in schools. *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement,* Third Edition, can be used to engage candidates in the work of continuous school improvement and comprehensive data analysis while getting certificated.

**My heartfelt hope** is that this book will prove to be so valuable that readers will never want to part with it in their lifetimes. I would love this book to be one of those books that graduate students keep with them after they complete their Administrative Credentials, Masters or Doctoral Programs, and find helpful throughout their careers.

## HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?

**It will take one school year for a school staff to do all the work described in this book. If parts of the work are already done, a staff might still want to spread out the work throughout the year.**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What would it take to get student learning increases for every student in your school?

2. Where does your school stand with respect to Figure 1.1?

3. Why might you read this book independently, or as a staff, to learn about how to improve teaching and learning through continuous school improvement and comprehensive data analysis?

4. What might help to engage your staff to commit to continuous school improvement and following the application opportunities at the end of each chapter?

## APPLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

1. Take an honest look at your school's student achievement results. Are the results improving in every grade level, subject area, student group, and for every student? If the answer is "no," please commit to engaging in these continuous school improvement efforts.

2. Review Figure 1.1. On which side of the figure does your school fall most often? Discuss with staff.

3. Does your staff want and need support in determining how to continuously improve all aspects of your learning organization? Join us in this journey. We will guide you through the process.